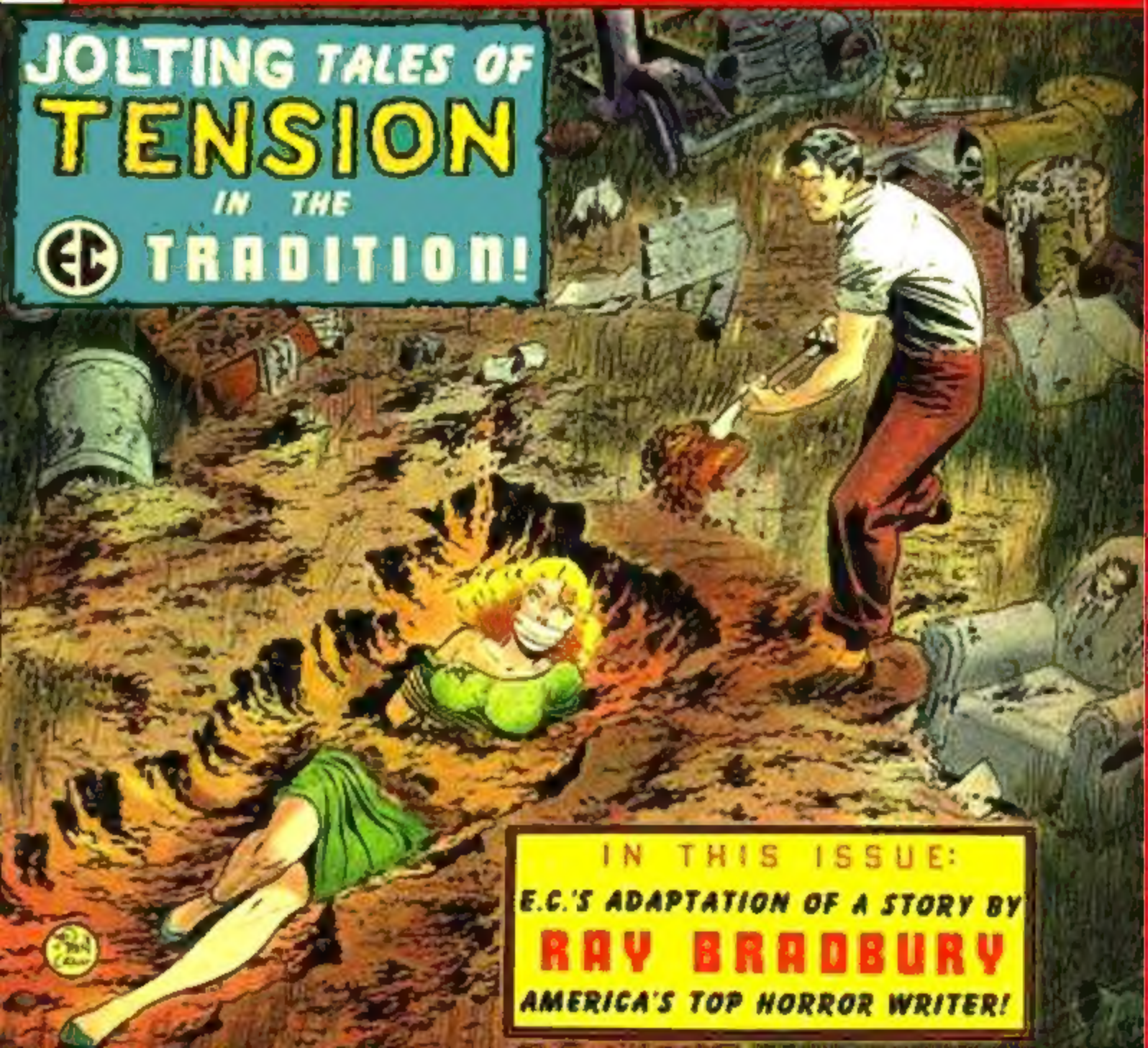
CRIME

NO.15

CRIME SUSPENSTORIES

REPRINT EDITION

JOLTING TALES OF TENSION IN THE EC TRADITION!



IN THIS ISSUE:

E.C.'S ADAPTATION OF A STORY BY

RAY BRADBURY

AMERICA'S TOP HORROR WRITER!

WHEN THE CAT'S AWAY...
AS USUAL, WE WERE ARGUING! LATELY, IT HAD BEEN HAPPENING MORE FREQUENTLY, AND IT WAS ALWAYS OVER SOME TRIVIAL MATTER...
ALL RIGHT! I FORGOT TO HANG UP MY PANTS! SO WHAT!
SO MAKE SURE THAT IT DOESN'T HAPPEN AGAIN! WHAT DO YOU THINK I AM, ANY-WAY?

I'D HATE TO TELL YOU WHAT I THINK YOU ARE! ALL I KNOW IS, I'M SICK OF LISTENING TO YOUR NAGGING!
WELL, YOU CAN LEAVE ANY TIME YOU CARE TO!
I WILL! I WILL! THAT'S JUST WHAT I HAD IN MIND!
SURE! GO RUNNING TO DICK LIKE YOU ALWAYS DO!
SO WHAT?! HE'S MY BEST FRIEND!
YOU TWO ARE SO COZY-COZY, SOMETIMES I THINK YOU'RE MARRIED TO HIM INSTEAD OF ME!
OH, YOU MAKE ME SICK!
AWK!
I KNEW I SHOULDN'T HAVE SHOVED HER! I DIDN'T WANT HER TO FALL, BUT IT WAS TOO LATE! SHE LAY SPRAWLED ON THE FLOOR, GASPING FOR AIR...
JAY...JAY...MY MEDICINE! MEDICINE...QUICKLY!
I'VE GOT IT, EMMA! HERE IT IS!
I CRADLED HER HEAD IN MY ARMS AND LET HER DRINK THE LIFE PRESERVING MEDICINE! A MOMENT LATER SHE WAS BREATHING NORMALLY, BUT SHE WAS STILL ANGRY...AND SO WAS I...
SORRY, EMMA! FORGOT ABOUT YOUR BAD HEART!
YOU FORGET SO OFTEN, SOMETIMES I THINK YOU WANT ME TO DIE!
WELL, THAT TIED IT! HOPING SHE WAS ALL RIGHT, I LEFT HER SITTING ON THE FLOOR, AND WENT THROUGH THE KITCHEN TO THE BACK PORCH...
...MOST AGGRAVATING WOMAN IN THE WORLD, AND I HAVE TO BE MARRIED TO HER!
2

DICK JORDAN WAS A BACHELOR, AND MY CLOSEST FRIEND! HE LIVED, ALONE, ON THE NEXT STREET... SO THAT HIS BACK DOOR FACED MINE! ALMOST EVERY TIME EMMA AND I ARGUED, I WOULD SPEND THE NIGHT WITH HIM TO COOL OFF...

I WALKED THROUGH THE CLUMP OF TREES THAT SEPARATED OUR HOMES AND RAPPED ON HIS BACK DOOR. HE OPENED IT ALMOST IMMEDIATELY...

JAY! WELL, THIS IS A SURPRISE! GOOD TO SEE YOU, PAL! COME ON IN!
HI, DICK! MIND IF I KEEP YOU COMPANY TONIGHT? HAD ANOTHER ROW WITH EMMA!

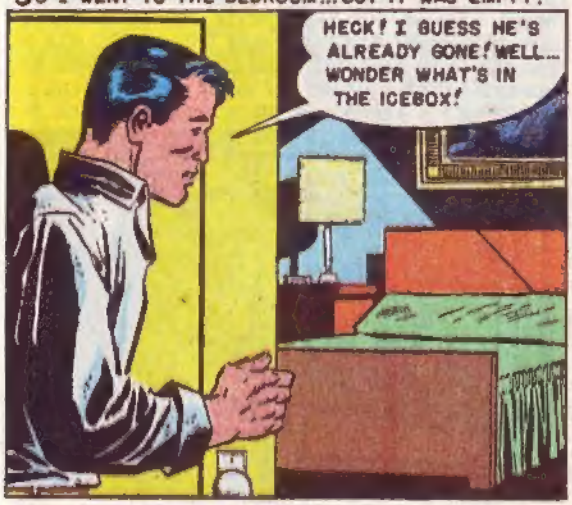
DICK MIXED DRINKS FOR US, AND WE TALKED FOR A LONG WHILE! FINALLY...

GUESS I'LL GO TO BED, DICK! SHALL I USE THE GUEST ROOM, AS USUAL?
SURE! I'D HIT THE SACK, TOO, BUT I HAVE TO GO TO WORK TONIGHT! SEE YOU IN THE MORNING!

I TOSSED AND TURNED IN BED FOR ALMOST TWO HOURS. I WAS TIRED... BUT I COULDN'T SLEEP!

I SLIPPED INTO MY CLOTHES AND WENT TO THE LIVING ROOM...

SO I WENT TO THE BEDROOM... BUT IT WAS EMPTY!



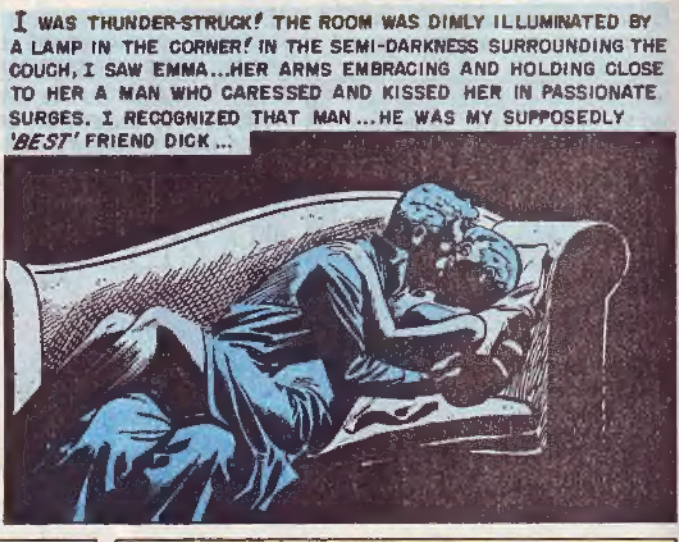
I CLOSED THE BEDROOM DOOR, MOVED INTO THE KITCHEN, AND MADE A SNACK OUT OF SOME CRACKERS, CHEESE AND MILK! WHEN I WAS DONE, I LIT A CIGARETTE... BUT I COULDN'T RELAX!

THE AIR WAS COOL AND CLEAN! I STROLLED ABOUT THE BACK LAWN UNTIL I'D FINISHED THE CIGARETTE...
I WONDER IF EMMA'S OKAY! MAYBE I'D BETTER CHECK!

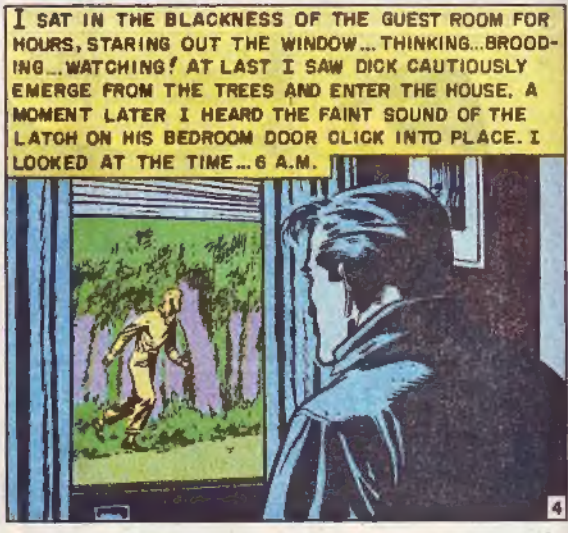
I FLIPPED THE BUTT AWAY AND STARTED THROUGH THE TREES TOWARD MY HOUSE...
DON'T KNOW WHY I'M WORRIED! I'D BE BETTER OFF IF SHE *DID* DIE OF A HEART ATTACK!

HMM...THERE'S A LIGHT IN THE LIVING ROOM! MAYBE *SHE* CAN'T SLEEP EITHER...OR MAYBE SHE WENT TO BED AND LEFT THE LIGHT ON FOR *ME!*

OR MAYBE SOMETHING HAD HAPPENED! I CREPT CLOSER TO THE WINDOW... AND PEERED IN...


I WAS THUNDER-STRUCK! THE ROOM WAS DIMLY ILLUMINATED BY A LAMP IN THE CORNER! IN THE SEMI-DARKNESS SURROUNDING THE COUCH, I SAW EMMA...HER ARMS EMBRACING AND HOLDING CLOSE TO HER A MAN WHO CARESSED AND KISSED HER IN PASSIONATE SURGES. I RECOGNIZED THAT MAN...HE WAS MY SUPPOSEDLY *'BEST'* FRIEND DICK...

MY FIRST IMPULSE WAS TO RUSH IN AND TEAR THEM APART...BUT I DIDN'T! THERE WERE OTHER WAYS TO MAKE THEM PAY... *MUCH* BETTER WAYS! SOMEHOW, I CONTROLLED MY SEETHING HATRED, AND STALKED BACK TO DICK'S HOUSE...


I SAT IN THE BLACKNESS OF THE GUEST ROOM FOR HOURS, STARING OUT THE WINDOW...THINKING...BROODING...WATCHING! AT LAST I SAW DICK CAUTIOUSLY EMERGE FROM THE TREES AND ENTER THE HOUSE. A MOMENT LATER I HEARD THE FAINT SOUND OF THE LATCH ON HIS BEDROOM DOOR CLICK INTO PLACE. I LOOKED AT THE TIME...6 A.M.

HOW LONG HAD THEY BEEN MAKING A CHUMP OF ME? HAD IT HAPPENED *EVERY* TIME I SPENT THE NIGHT AT DICK'S? THE THOUGHT OF IT APPALLED ME...

AT EIGHT A.M. I TIP-TOED TO DICK'S ROOM AND NOISLESSLY OPENED THE DOOR. HE WAS SLEEPING SOUNDLY... AND A KNOWING, CONTENTED SMILE PLAYED ON HIS FACE...

I SHUT THE DOOR AND LEFT! A FEW MINUTES LATER, I WAS TAKING A SHOWER IN MY OWN HOME. *I* HAD TO GO TO WORK, EVEN IF DICK DIDN'T!

I DRESSED AND SHAVED... BUT BEFORE I LEFT THE HOUSE, I QUIETLY OPENED THE DOOR TO EMMA'S BEDROOM. LIKE DICK, SHE TOO WAS DEEP IN SLEEP... AND, LIKE DICK... *SHE TOO HAD A KNOWING, CONTENTED SMILE ON HER FACE...*

I WENT TO THE OFFICE, BUT DIDN'T ACCOMPLISH MUCH! MY MIND WAS PLAGUED WITH VISIONS OF EMMA AND DICK! I ARRIVED HOME THAT NIGHT A TIRED, SORRY-LOOKING WRECK! BUT I FELT GOOD INSIDE BECAUSE I HAD FORMED A PLAN! AFTER DINNER...

MY BOSS SAID HE WANTS ME TO LEAVE TOWN TOMORROW TO CHECK ONE OF OUR BRANCH OFFICES! I'LL BE GONE ABOUT A WEEK!

OH? *A FULL WEEK*, DID YOU SAY?

THAT'S RIGHT! RIGHT NOW, I'M GOING TO THE STORE! I WANT TO GET SOME THINGS!

SUIT YOURSELF!

I LEFT THE HOUSE AND WENT DOWN THE STREET... BUT AS SOON AS I WAS OUT OF SIGHT, I TURNED AND DOUBLED BACK! I CREPT SILENTLY TO A WINDOW AND LOOKED INSIDE! I CHUCKLED... FOR EMMA WAS USING THE PHONE...

YES, DICK! ISN'T IT *WONDERFUL*? *A WHOLE WEEK!* OF COURSE! COME OVER ABOUT *EIGHT!* YES... TOMORROW NIGHT! 'BYE...

I DIDN'T WORK THE NEXT DAY! I BUSIED MYSELF WITH PREPARATIONS FOR MY 'TRIP'...PACKING, CHECKING TIMETABLES, ETC...

GUESS I'LL TAKE THE 6:20 TRAIN TO NEW YORK!

ALL RIGHT, JAY! I'LL SEE THAT ALL YOUR THINGS ARE READY!

EMMA WAS A REGULAR EAGER BEAVER. SHE MADE *CERTAIN* I HAD EVERYTHING!

THERE! ALL DONE! WHEW!

I'M ALL SET! JUST HAVE TO WAIT TILL TRAIN TIME!

SHE DIDN'T REALIZE IT, BUT HER ANXIETY TO SEE ME LEAVE WAS AS PLAIN AS DAY! I HUNG AROUND TILL THE LAST MINUTE, AND SHE WAS AS JITTERY AS A KITTEN FOR FEAR I'D MISS THE TRAIN...

QUICKLY, I STRODE DOWN THE STREET... AND AS SOON AS I TURNED THE CORNER, I STOPPED! I HAD NO INTENTION OF GOING ANY FURTHER, SO I STEPPED INTO THE BUSHES, DROPPED THE SUITCASE, AND SAT DOWN ...

PATIENTLY I WAITED... COMPLETELY HIDDEN FROM VIEW BY THE DENSE FOLIAGE! TWO HOURS PASSED... I LOOKED AT MY WATCH...

AH... QUARTER OF EIGHT! TIME TO GET BACK TO THE HOUSE!

I SNEAKED BACK TO THE HOUSE WITHOUT ANYONE SEEING ME AND STEPPED ONTO THE *BACK* PORCH! THE SWEET, MELODIOUS TONE OF EMMA'S VOICE AS SHE CALLED AN ANSWER TO MY KNOCKS SOUNDED LIKE IT CAME FROM A STRANGER...

JUST A MINUTE...

A MOMENT PASSED... AND THEN I HEARD THE CLICK-CLICK OF HER HEELS AS SHE CAME TO LET ME IN! SHE SWEPT OPEN THE DOOR AS A BURST OF LIGHT KNIFED THE DARKNESS AND BATHED ME IN ITS BRILLIANCE...

HELLO, EMMA...

HELLO, DEAR, I... WHA...?

JAY!

SHE HAD BEEN KNOCKED FOR A LOOP! SHE STUTTERED AND STAMMERED... AND CAST NERVOUS GLANCES AT THE WALL CLOCK...
BUT...BUT, WHY ARE YOU BACK?! I MEAN... HOW? DID YOU...?
THERE WAS AN ACCIDENT! DICK...
ACCIDENT?! DICK?! WHA... WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?!
ON MY WAY TO THE TRAIN.. I SAW DICK! HE WAVED TO ME... STEPPED IN FRONT OF A TRUCK! HE... HE'S DEAD!
DEAD!!? OH, NO! GOOD LORD! GASP! NOT DICK!
YEAH... ISN'T IT AWFUL? THAT TRUCK CRUSHED HIM LIKE AN EGG-SHELL!
SHE WAS SPEECHLESS! HER SKIN WAS DEATHLY WHITE AND SHE WAS SHAKING ALL OVER! I WENT INTO THE KITCHEN TO MAKE SOME COFFEE, AND WHILE THERE, I HALF-UNSCREWED THE CEILING LIGHT BULB FROM ITS SOCKET! WHEN I GOT BACK, SHE WAS STRAINING LIKE CRAZY TO KEEP CONTROL OF HERSELF! I SAID NOTHING! I WAITED...
I LOOKED AT THE TIME! TWO MINUTES OF EIGHT!
EMMA! GO TO THE KITCHEN AND POUR THE COFFEE, EH?
WHA...? (GASP!) OH, YES! YES, OF COURSE! (GASP!)
SHE STUMBLED OFF TO THE KITCHEN LOOKING LIKE AN OLD, OLD WOMAN! HER BREATHS WERE COMING IN SHORT DESPERATE GULPS, AND I SMILED AS I HEARD THE SNICKING OF THE WALL SWITCH! THEN...
JAY...JAY...THE LIGHT WON'T WORK! (GASP!) JAY, PLEASE...I...I FEEL (GASP!) SO WEAK. YOU FIX THE COFFEE...
SURE, EMMA... SURE! I'LL BE RIGHT THERE!
MY TIMING WAS PERFECT! I ENTERED THE DARK KITCHEN, THE GUN IN MY POCKET! I BARELY HAD TIME TO MELT INTO THE SHADOWS WHEN I HEARD THE SOUND... THE SOUND OF A FOOTSTEP ON THE BACK PORCH! EMMA HEARD IT TOO...
I CAN'T SEE YOU (GASP!) JAY! THIS LIGHT SWITCH WAS WORKING BEFORE...
(GASP!) WHA... WHAT'S THAT NOISE???

EMMA WHIRLED AT THE SOUND! I COULD HEAR HER BREATHING... FRIGHTENED, ALMOST PANICKY! THE SCREEN DOOR OPENED...

EMMA?

DICK! NO! NO! YOU'RE DEAD!

AWK....

LIKE A SACK OF POTATOES, SHE CRUMPLED UP IN A HEAP ON THE FLOOR! DICK TRIED TO SEE INTO THE DARKNESS! HE TOOK ONE FALTERING STEP...AND I STOPPED HIM DEAD IN HIS TRACKS!

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!

HIS BODY HIT THE FLOOR WITH A THUD... AND I WAITED, LISTENING INTENTLY FOR ANY SOUND! IT WAS AS QUIET AS A TOMB! I KNELT BESIDE THE BODIES AND FELT THEIR PULSES! THEY WERE *DEAD*, ALL RIGHT! I GRINNED...

MY GRIN CHANGED TO A SMILE AS I PUT THE GUN ON THE TABLE AND LEFT THE ROOM! I PICKED A CIGARETTE FROM MY PACK AND LIT IT...

THE CHUMPS! THE STUPID, LUNKHEADED *CHUMPS!*

CASUALLY, I CARRIED MY SUITCASE UPSTAIRS AND METHODICALLY BEGAN TO REPLACE MY CLOTHES NEATLY IN THEIR RESPECTIVE DRAWERS! IT HAD BEEN SO EASY...

SO EASY, AND SO *PERFECT!* EMMA HAD BEEN PREPARING COFFEE IN THE KITCHEN WHEN MY BEST FRIEND SUDDENLY APPEARED AT THE DOOR! THE LIGHTS WEREN'T WORKING AND MY WIFE, FRIGHTENED, *SUFFERED A HEART ATTACK!*

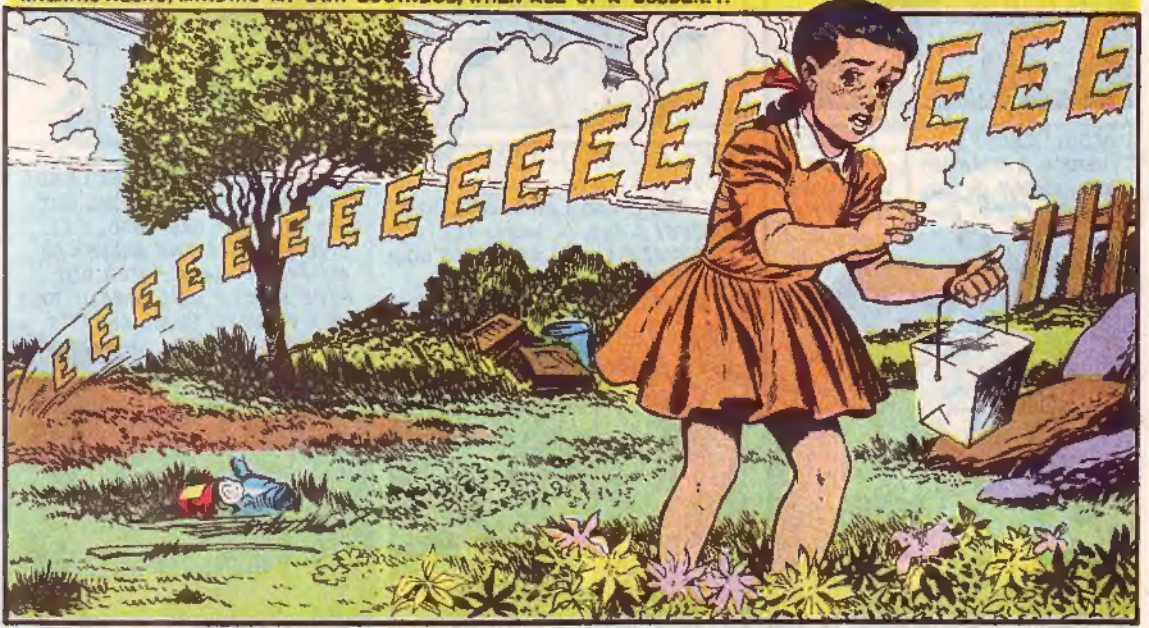
I HEARD HER SCREAM AND RUSHED TO HELP HER... MY GUN DRAWN! WHEN I SAW THE FIGURE BENDING OVER HER, I FIRED, KILLING HIM! HECK, IT WAS TOO *DARK* TO SEE WHO HE WAS! I THOUGHT HE WAS A *BURGLAR!* HEH! IT WASN'T THE *TRUTH*...BUT THAT'S WHAT I'LL TELL THE COPS!

POLICE HEADQUARTERS? I WANT TO REPORT A *TERRIBLE* ACCIDENT!

THE END

THE SCREAMING WOMAN!

MY NAME IS *MARGARET LEARY* AND I'M *TEN* YEARS OLD AND IN THE FIFTH GRADE AT CENTRAL SCHOOL! I HAVEN'T ANY *BROTHERS* OR *SISTERS*, BUT I'VE GOT A NICE FATHER AND MOTHER EXCEPT THEY DON'T PAY MUCH *ATTENTION!* I GOT TO TELL YOU HOW IT *HAPPENED!* IT WAS A NOON IN THE MIDDLE OF JULY! IT WAS HOT AND MAMA HAD SENT ME FOR ICE CREAM! I RAN OUT ACROSS THE EMPTY LOT BEHIND MY HOUSE! IT WAS A BIG LOT, WHERE KIDS HAD PLAYED BASEBALL, AND HAD BROKEN GLASS AND STUFF! AND ON MY WAY BACK FROM THE STORE WITH THE ICE CREAM I WAS JUST WALKING ALONG, MINDING MY OWN BUSINESS, WHEN ALL OF A SUDDEN...



I HEARD THE *SCREAMING WOMAN!* IT WAS COMING UP OUT OF THE GROUND! A WOMAN WAS BURIED UNDER THE ROCKS AND DIRT AND GLASS, AND SHE WAS SCREAMING ALL WILD AND HORRIBLE, FOR SOMEONE TO DIG HER OUT...

I JUST STOOD THERE, AFRAID! SHE KEPT SCREAMING, MUFFLED! THEN I STARTED TO RUN! I FELL DOWN, GOT UP, AND RAN SOME MORE! I GOT IN THE SCREEN-DOOR AND THERE WAS MAMA, CALM AS YOU PLEASE, NOT *KNOWING* WHAT *I* KNEW...

MAMA! THERE'S A *REAL LIVE WOMAN BURIED OUT IN BACK OF OUR HOUSE*, JUST A *HUNDRED YARDS AWAY*... SCREAMING *BLOODY MURDER! MAMA*...
DON'T *STAND* THERE WITH THE ICE CREAM! PUT IT IN THE *ICEBOX!*

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LISTEN, MAMA! THERE'S A SCREAMING WOMAN IN THE EMPTY LOT! SHE WAS SCREAMIN' AND SCREAMIN'...
...AND WASH YOUR HANDS! LET'S SEE NOW... SALT... PEPPER...
WE GOT TO DIG HER OUT! SHE'S BURIED UNDER TONS AND TONS OF DIRT AND IF WE DON'T DIG HER OUT, SHE'LL CHOKE UP AND DIE...
I'M CERTAIN SHE CAN WAIT UNTIL AFTER LUNCH!
MAMA! DON'T YOU BELIEVE ME? WE'VE GOT TO HELP HER...
OF COURSE, DEAR! NOW WASH YOUR HANDS AND TAKE THIS PLATE OF MEAT IN TO YOUR FATHER!
DADDY! DADDY! THERE'S A SCREAMING WOMAN IN THE EMPTY LOT!
I NEVER KNEW A WOMAN WHO DIDN'T!
SHE'S BURIED! WE'VE GOT TO GET PICKS AND SHOVELS AND EXCAVATE, LIKE AN EGYPTIAN MUMMY!
I DON'T FEEL LIKE AN ARCHAEOLOGIST, MARGARET! NOW, SOME NICE COOL DAY IN OCTOBER, I'LL TAKE YOU UP ON THAT!
BUT WE CAN'T WAIT THAT LONG! DAD, YOU JUST GOTTA COME OUT AND HELP ME! DAD! DAD, I'LL GIVE YOU ALL THE MONEY IN MY PIGGY BANK! I'VE GOT FIVE WHOLE DOLLARS, IT TOOK ME A YEAR TO SAVE... AND IT'S ALL YOURS...
I'M TOUCHED! I'M REALLY TOUCHED! YOU WANT ME TO PLAY WITH YOU AND YOU'RE WILLING TO PAY FOR MY TIME! HONEST, MARGARET! YOU MAKE YOUR OLD DAD FEEL LIKE A PIKER! I DON'T GIVE YOU ENOUGH TIME! TELL YOU WHAT! I'LL COME OUT AND LISTEN TO YOUR SCREAMING WOMAN FREE OF CHARGE!
WILL YOU? OH, WILL YOU, REALLY?
...AFTER LUNCH! BUT, YOU MUST EAT ALL OF YOUR LUNCH FIRST!
MOTHER CAME IN AND SAT DOWN AND WE STARTED EATING...
NOT SO FAST!
YOU HEARD YOUR MOTHER!
BUT, THE SCREAMING WOMAN! WE'VE GOT TO HURRY!
2

I INTEND *SITTING* HERE *QUIETLY* GIVING MY ATTENTION *FIRST* TO MY STEAK, *THEN* TO MY POTATOES... AND MY SALAD, OF COURSE... *THEN* TO MY ICE CREAM, AND AFTER *THAT* TO A LONG DRINK OF ICED COFFEE, IF YOU *DON'T MIND!* I MAY BE A *GOOD HOUR AT IT!* AND *ANOTHER* THING, YOUNG LADY! IF YOU *MENTION* HER *NAME*... THIS *SCREAMING WHATSIS*... ONCE *MORE* DURING LUNCH, I WON'T GO *OUT* WITH YOU TO *HEAR* HER RECITAL! IS THAT *UNDERSTOOD?*

YES, SIR!

LUNCH WAS A MILLION YEARS LONG! EVERBODY MOVED IN SLOW MOTION! EVEN THE FLIES IN THE ROOM WERE SLOW! AND ALL THE WHILE WE SAT THERE SLOWLY, SLOWLY EATING OUR LUNCH, OUT THERE IN THE EMPTY LOT WAS THE SCREAMING WOMAN, ALL ALONE, WHILE THE WORLD ATE ITS LUNCH AND THE SUN WAS HOT AND THE LOT WAS EMPTY AS THE SKY. . .

SPEAKING OF SCREAMING WOMEN, *CHARLIE NESBITT* AND HIS WIFE, *HELEN*, HAD ANOTHER *FIGHT* LAST NIGHT! IF YOU ASK ME, *HE'S NO GOOD*... OR *HER EITHER!*

OH, I DON'T KNOW! I THINK HELEN'S *PRETTY NICE!*

YOU'RE PREJUDICED! AFTER ALL, YOU ALMOST *MARRIED* HER! YOU SHOWED SOME *SENSE* WHEN YOU BROKE OFF *THAT* ENGAGEMENT!

OH, YOU KNOW *HELEN!* BESIDES SHE WAS *STAGE-STRUCK!* I REMEMBER SHE WROTE A *SONG* FOR ME ONCE! HOW *DID* IT GO...

HMMPH! YOU NEVER *TOLD* ME THAT! A *SONG*...

IT WAS BETWEEN *HELEN* AND *ME!* *PRIVATE*, LIKE! LET'S SEE... DUM-DE-DUM... HOW *DID* IT GO?

DAD? PLEASE...?

YOU'D BETTER TAKE YOUR *DAUGHTER* OUT IN THE BACK LOT BEFORE SHE *COLLAPSES!* YOU'LL *SING* ME THAT WONDERFUL SONG *LATER!*

OKAY! C'MON YOU.

HURRY! HURRY!

THE EMPTY LOT WAS STILL EMPTY AND HOT AND THE GLASS SPARKLED GREEN AND WHITE AND BROWN ALL AROUND WHERE THE BOTTLES LAY...

WE FORGOT THE *SHOVELS!*

WELL GET THEM *LATER*, AFTER WE *HEAR* THE SOLOIST!

I TOOK HIM TO THE SPOT...

I DON'T HEAR *ANYTHING!*

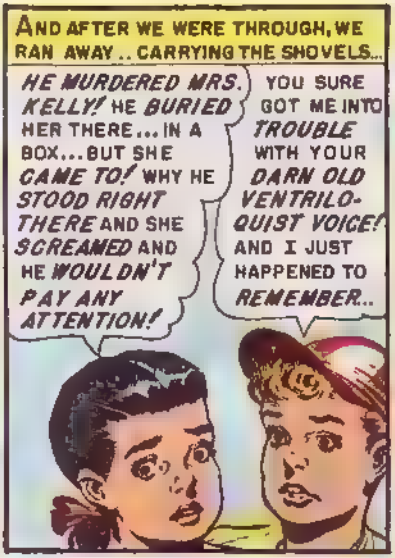
SHH! *WAIT! LISTEN!*

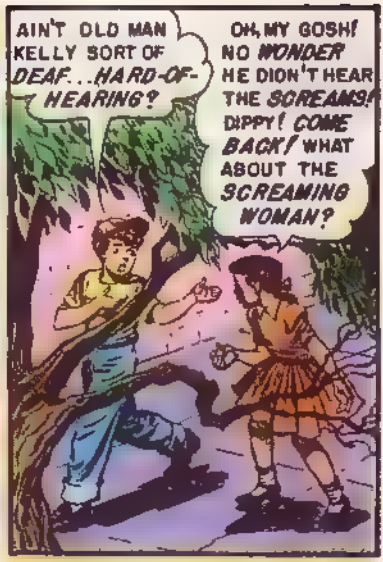
WE HEARD THE SUN IN THE SKY! WE HEARD THE WIND IN THE TREES, REAL QUIET! WE HEARD A STREET-CAR, FAR AWAY, RUNNING ALONG! WE HEARD A CAR PASS! *THAT WAS ALL!*

MARGARET! I SUGGEST YOU GO LIE DOWN AND PUT A DAMP CLOTH ON YOUR HEAD! I'M GOING BACK IN AND TAKE A SHOWER!
OH, DADDY! WE CAN'T LET HER DIE! SHE'S ALL BURIED, LIKE THAT PERSON IN THE STORY!
I RAN TO THE GARAGE AND GOT A COUPLE OF SHOVELS AND RAN TO THE EMPTY LOT! I STARTED TO DIG, AND THE WOMAN SCREAMED AGAIN! IT WAS HARD WORK, BUT WHAT COULD I DO! RUN TELL OTHER PEOPLE? THEY'D BE LIKE MOM AND DAD... PAY NO ATTENTION...
HI, MARGARET! WHAT ARE YOU DOIN'?
I GOT A SCREAMING WOMAN IN THE GROUND, DIPPY, AND I'M DIGGING FOR HER!
I DON'T HEAR NO SCREAMING!
YOU SIT DOWN AND WAIT AWHILE, AND YOU'LL HEAR HER SCREAM!
DIPPY WAITED! AND FINALLY, THE SCREAMING WOMAN SCREAMED...
HEY! THAT'S OKAY! DO IT AGAIN! GO ON! I'LL GIVE YOU A MARBLE IF YOU DO IT AGAIN!
I DON'T...
ANOTHER SCREAM CAME OUT OF THE GROUND...
DID YOU GET THE THROW-YOUR-VOICE BOOK FOR A DIME FROM THAT MAGIC COMPANY? YOU GOT ONE OF THOSE VENTRILOQUIST CONTRAPTIONS IN YOUR MOUTH?
Y-YES! IF YOU HELP DIG, I'LL TELL YOU ABOUT IT!
JUST THEN, A SHADOW FELL ACROSS US! IT WAS MR. KELLY, THE MAN WHO OWNED THE EMPTY LOT...
HEY, YOU KIDS! WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?
OH! 'LO, MR. KELLY!
NOW YOU TAKE THOSE SHOVELS AND TAKE THAT SOIL AND SHOVEL IT RIGHT BACK IN THAT HOLE YOU HAVE BEEN DIGGING!
BUT MR. KELLY! THERE'S A SCREAMING WOMAN...
I'M NOT INTERESTED!
LISTEN!
THE SCREAM...
DON'T HEAR NOTHING! GO ON, NOW! FILL IT UP AND GET HOME WITH YOU BEFORE I GIVE YOU MY FOOT!
E-E-E-E-E
4

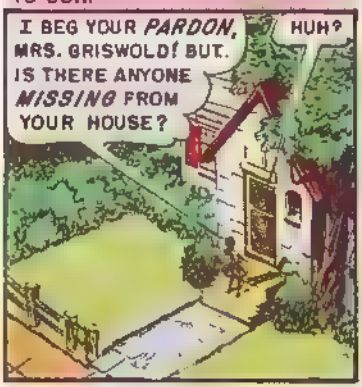
WE FILLED THE HOLE ALL BACK IN AGAIN! AND ALL THE WHILE WE FILLED IT IN, MR. KELLY STOOD THERE, AND THE WOMAN SCREAMED, BUT MR. KELLY PRETENDED NOT TO HEAR IT...

AND AFTER WE WERE THROUGH, WE RAN AWAY.. CARRYING THE SHOVELS...


HE MURDERED MRS. KELLY! HE BURIED HER THERE... IN A BOX... BUT SHE CAME TO! WHY HE STOOD RIGHT THERE AND SHE SCREAMED AND HE WOULDN'T PAY ANY ATTENTION!
YOU SURE GOT ME INTO TROUBLE WITH YOUR DARN OLD VENTRILO-QUIST VOICE! AND I JUST HAPPENED TO REMEMBER..

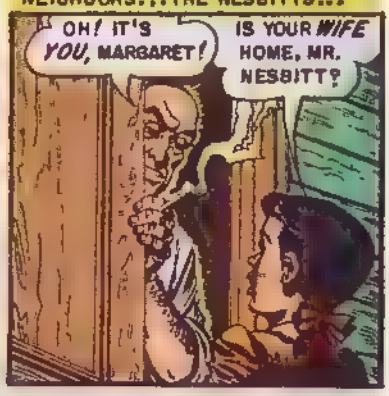

AIN'T OLD MAN KELLY SORT OF DEAF... HARD-OF-HEARING?
OH, MY GOSH! NO WONDER HE DION'T HEAR THE SCREAMS! DIPPY! COME BACK! WHAT ABOUT THE SCREAMING WOMAN?

I WAS LEFT ALL ALONE IN THE WORLD... NO ONE TO HELP ME... NO ONE TO BELIEVE ME AT ALL! THERE WAS ONLY ONE LAST THING TO DO...

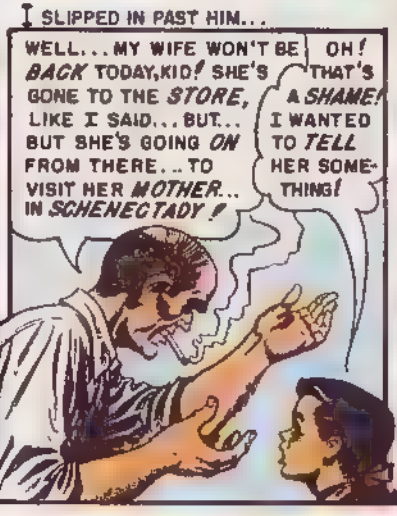


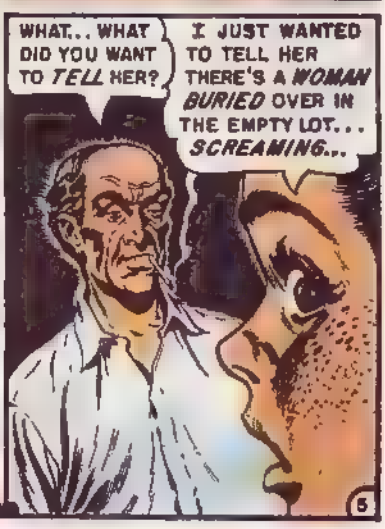
I WENT FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE ALL DOWN THE STREET! I RANG EVERY BELL...

...AND ONCE I SAW THAT THE LADY OF THE HOUSE WAS HOME, I WENT ON DOWN THE STREET! FINALLY I CAME TO THE LAST DOOR... OUR NEIGHBORS... THE NESBITTS...



I SLIPPED IN PAST HIM...


WELL... MY WIFE WON'T BE BACK TODAY, KID! SHE'S GONE TO THE STORE, LIKE I SAID... BUT... BUT SHE'S GOING ON FROM THERE.. TO VISIT HER MOTHER... IN SCHENECTADY!
OH! THAT'S A SHAME! I WANTED TO TELL HER SOME-THING!



YOU DROPPED YOUR CIGARETTE, MR. NESBITT!
OH, DID I? SURE! SO I DID! YOU... YOU...EH...YOU SAY ANYTHING ABOUT THIS TO ANYONE, KID?
SURE! I TOLD LOTS OF PEOPLE!
ANYBODY DOIN' ANYTHING ABOUT IT?
NO! THEY WON'T BELIEVE ME!
OF COURSE! HEH, HEH! NATURALLY! YOU'RE NOTHING BUT A KID! WHY SHOULD THEY LISTEN TO YOU?
I'M GOING BACK NOW AND DIG HER OUT WITH A SPADE!
STICK AROUND!
I KNEW WHAT HE WAS TRYING TO DO! HE WAS TRYING TO KEEP ME IN HIS HOUSE UNTIL THE SCREAMING DIED DOWN! HE WAS TRYING TO KEEP ME FROM HELPING HER...
I GOT TO GO!
LET'S PLAY CARDS! MY WIFE'LL BE HOME SOON! SURE! TEN MINUTES! SIT DOWN!
WE PLAYED CARDS! THE CLOCK TICKED! THE SUN WENT DOWN! IT WAS GETTING LATE! THE SCREAMING GOT FAINTER IN MY MIND! I JUMPED UP AND RAN OUT THE DOOR...
HEY, YOU...
I GOT TO GO, MR. NESBITT!
I WENT BACK TO THE EMPTY LOT AND I HID IN SOME BUSHES! WHAT COULD I DO? NOBODY WOULD BELIEVE ME...
THE SCREAMING! THE SCREAMING'S STOPPED!
IT WAS SO QUIET I THOUGHT I'D NEVER HEAR A SCREAM AGAIN! IT WAS ALL OVER! IT WAS TOO LATE! I BENT DOWN AND PUT MY EAR TO THE GROUND...
P...PLEASE... PLEASE... DON'T DIE...
AND THEN I HEARD IT...WAY DOWN, WAY DEEP, AND SO FAINT I COULD HARDLY HEAR IT! THE WOMAN WASN'T SCREAMING ANYMORE! SHE WAS SINGING...
I LOVED YOU FAIR... ♪ I LOVED YOU WELL... ♪
6

IT WAS SORT OF A BAD SONG...VERY FAINT! AND SORT OF BROKEN! ALL OF THE HOURS DOWN UNDER THE GROUND IN THE BOX MUST HAVE SORT OF MADE HER CRAZY! I LISTENED TO THE SONG...AND THEN I WALKED HOME...
SO THERE YOU ARE! WELL, YOU'RE GOING TO GET THE LICKING OF YOUR LIFE! DO YOU KNOW WHAT TIME IT IS?
WHY...
SHE'S NOT SCREAMING ANY MORE, DADDY! SHE'S SINGING NOW!
YOU'RE NOT TELLING THE TRUTH!
DADDY! SHE'S OUT THERE AND SHE'LL BE DEAD SOON IF YOU DON'T LISTEN TO ME! SHE'S OUT THERE, SINGING, AND THIS IS WHAT SHE'S SINGING...
I LOVED YOU FAIR.. I LOVED YOU WELL...
WHERE.. WHERE DID YOU HEAR THAT SONG?
OUT IN THE EMPTY LOT... JUST NOW!
BUT THAT'S HELEN'S SONG.. THE ONE SHE WROTE...YEARS AGO...FOR ME! YOU CAN'T KNOW IT! NOBODY KNOWS IT, EXCEPT HELEN AND ME! I NEVER SANG IT TO ANYONE!
SURE, DADDY!
OH, MY GOD!
DADDY RAN OUT THE DOOR TO GET A SHOVEL..
HELEN..HELEN...
THE LAST I SAW OF HIM, HE WAS IN THE EMPTY LOT... DIGGING! AND LOTS OF OTHER PEOPLE WERE WITH HIM... DIGGING...
AND I FELT SO HAPPY, I WANTED TO CRY!
THE END

"The wind was so sirocco, it nearly drove me loco
As I rowed my girl, Rococo, down the Orinoco!"

Bill Gaines sang lustily as he played "Pianos" on a baby grand chopstick. He was rehearsing for his forth-coming recital at a local supermarket opening

Suddenly, the Obese Man waddled into Gaines' office and stuck a heater-repeater under the troubador's right ear lobe. "Hands up, skinny, or you'll get a slight flesh wound of the right ventricle!"

"Sidney Greenalley . international double-dealer, crook, and murderer! I saw your 'wanted' circular in court!"

"The Court of Knights in Jamaica, no doubt!", hissed the fat slob

"No! The Jamaica Night Court!!", snapped the fearless, crusading publisher

The Obese Man shook his flabby jowls. When he cleared his throat, it sounded like a wind-tunnel in full blast "I was sent here by my er . . client, the publisher of Beaten Path Comics! He's getting tired of your stubbornly superior competition. First, you scooped him with horror stories, then suspense, then science-fiction and war stories Now you've signed your death warrant by bringing out a *comic* comic, MAD! Either sell out to us, or you get a shower of molten lead!"

Just then, Greenalley's two gunsels herded writer-editor Al Feldstein and writer Jerry Dee into the office

"They've pushed my editor, Harvey Kurtzman, into his old army knapsack and shoved him into the filing case. Mr Gaines! They filed him away between 'ESOTERIC COGITATIONS' and 'FLYING SAUCERS' They could have put him under 'KURTZMAN-PERSONAL . at least!", whined Jerry Dee

Greenalley shoved ownership papers under Gaines' nose. "Sign E C over to us! Any tricks and my boys'll beat you *within an inch* of your life!" The two hoods stood by with micrometers!

"You'll never get your dirty claws on E.C.! Do your worst!!", Gaines retorted defiantly

. . . . .

When the three regained consciousness they felt as though they were nailed to the floor. Six railway spikes held them firmly in place like a broadloom carpet! Greenalley slipped off one of Feldstein's alligator pumps and shoved a Chinese Boot onto his foot. "Oh, that's rather *large!* I take a 10D "

"I'll see that you get a good fit when I 'lace up' this lead loafer!", the corpulent one chuckled!

Bill Gaines whispered to his trussed-up fellows, "We may be rescued yet! Are any of the artists delivering their work today?" Al shook his head slowly. "Nah! Jack Davis is out golfing, Bill Elder is home with a bad case of poison ivy, Al Williamson is being fitted for a Craftint twill suit, Ghastly Graham's planting watermelons in his window box, Woody's building a rocket ship in his basement, Johnny Severn's around the corner at Patrissy's, eating a double portion of spaghetti and mushrooms "

While his triggermen twisted the screws tighter on the torture-shoes, the Obese Man lit up a cigarette and let it dangle from his lip. He liked the way it dangled, so he lit another and let it dangle. Soon twenty cigarettes were dangling from his lip. He was about to send out for a carton of butts when the office door flew open! There stood Ruby Kast and Marie Severin! The efficient secretary and the creative color-artist of E C. had just returned from the local hair-dresser's

The dynamic darlings of E.C quickly armed themselves with an Address-O-Graph machine and a wooden T-square. Then they began hacking and whacking at the quailing badmen! Marie did a great color job on them black bruises with a blue overlay. Ruby had likewise left the imprint of the rapid-fire addressing machine on their dented brain-pans!

When the Obese Man and his gunsels were completely subdued, they were dumped into separate mailing sacks, loaded on a hand-truck and wheeled off to the post office!

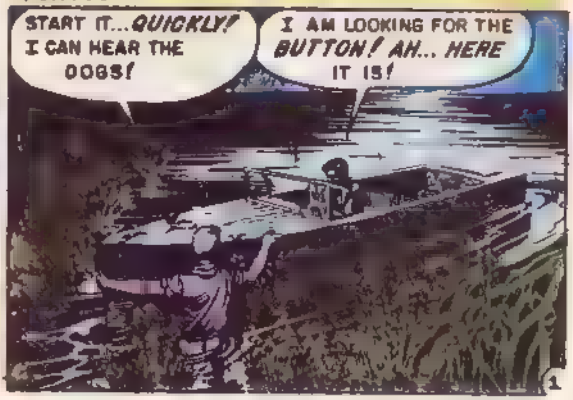
They are now traveling by the least scenic route to Karachi, India!

HERE ARE A PAIR OF VERY DRY "E.C. QUICKIES"! THE FIRST ONE IS CALLED:

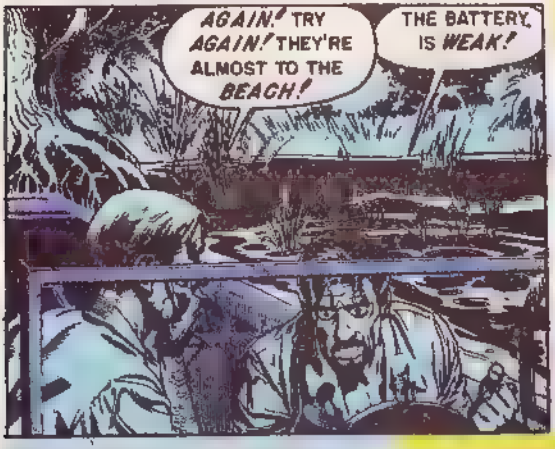
WATER, WATER, EVERYWHERE...

IN THIS FIRST 'E.C. QUICKIE,' YOUR NAME IS *LOUIS DUVAL!* YOU ARE *FRENCH!* FOR THE *LAST TEN YEARS*, YOU HAVE BEEN AN *INMATE* OF A TINY *ISLAND PRISON* OFF THE COAST OF *SOUTH AMERICA!* BUT *NOW*... AFTER TEN LONG YEARS OF BONDAGE...YOU ARE *FREE*...

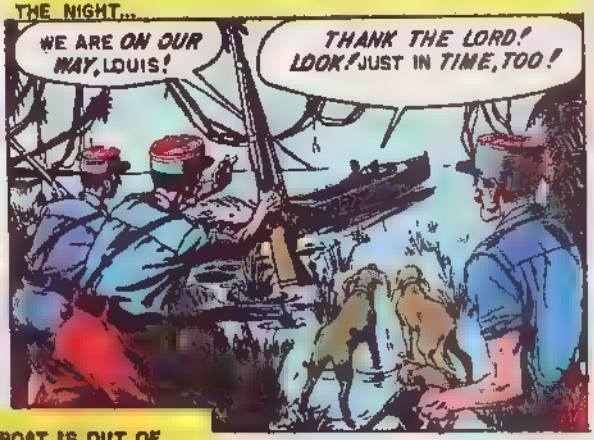
YES, LOUIS! YOU ARE *FREE!* YOU HAVE *ESCAPED!* YOU AND YOUR CELL-MATE, HENRI POUSSAN, HAVE JUST MADE A *MAD DASH* THROUGH THE JUNGLE SURROUNDING THE PRISON STOCKADE TO THE *BEACH* WHERE THE BOAT AWAITS... THE BOAT THAT YOU *BRIBED A GUARD FOR*...



HENRI PRESSES THE STARTER BUTTON AND THE ENGINE KICKS OVER... COUGHING...



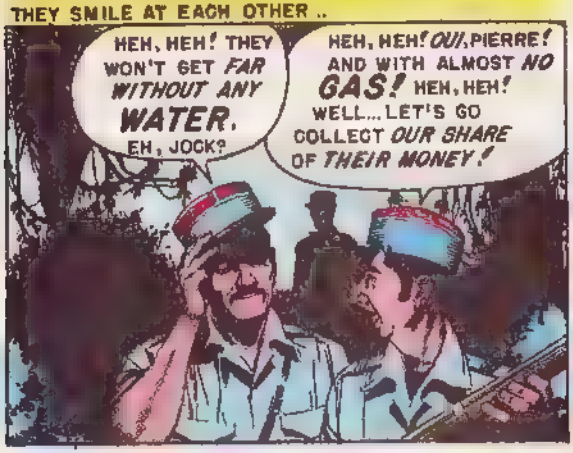
YOU SCAN THE BEACH, WATCHING FOR THE GUARDS TO BREAK FROM THE OVERGROWTH THAT RIMS IT. SUDDENLY THE ENGINE STARTS! THE WELCOME DRONE ECHOES INTO THE NIGHT...



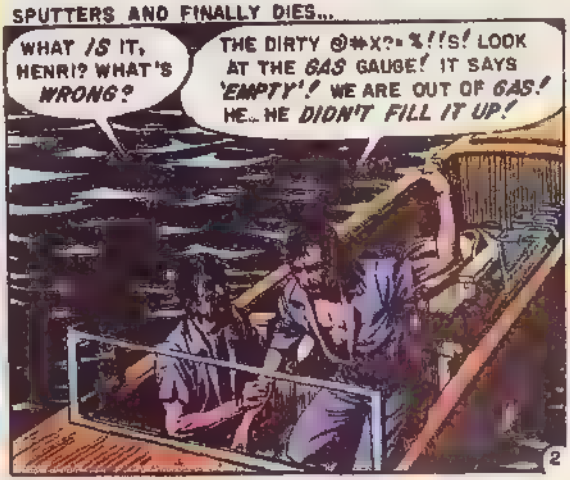
THE GUARDS WITH THE YELPING BLOODHOUNDS ARE ON THE BEACH NOW! HENRI GUNS THE BOAT AHEAD AT FULL SPEED TOWARD THE OPEN SEA...

FINALLY YOUR BOAT IS OUT OF RANGE OF THE GUARDS' SHOTS! YOU SETTLE BACK TO CATCH YOUR BREATH...

THE GUARDS BACK ON THE BEACH WATCH AS YOUR MOTOR BOAT DISAPPEARS INTO THE NIGHT! THEN THEY SMILE AT EACH OTHER..

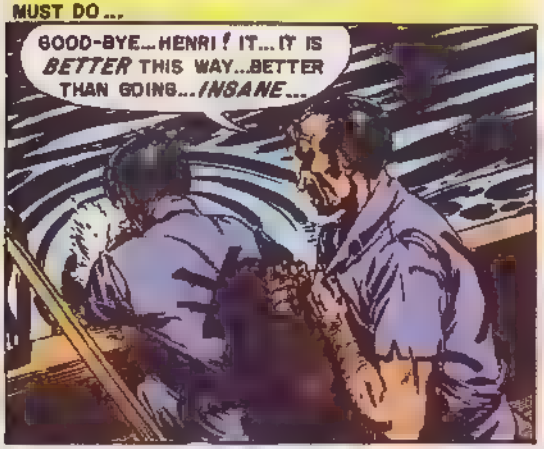

HEH, HEH! THEY WON'T GET FAR WITHOUT ANY WATER. EH, JOCK?
HEH, HEH! OUI, PIERRE! AND WITH ALMOST NO GAS! HEH, HEH! WELL... LET'S GO COLLECT OUR SHARE OF THEIR MONEY!

IT'S ABOUT TWO HOURS LATER THAT THE ENGINE SPUTTERS AND FINALLY DIES...

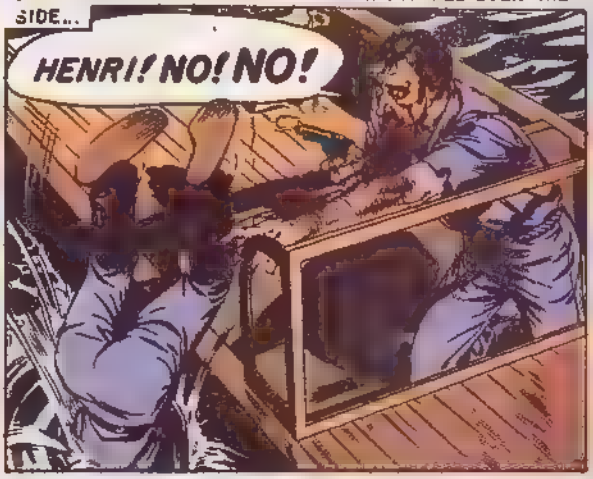


AND NOW YOU ARE ADRIFT .. ADRIFT ON THE OPEN SEA! SOON, THE DAWN BREAKS... AND THE BLAZING TROPICAL SUN CLIMBS INTO THE HOT SKY...
I CANNOT SEE THE MAIN-LAND!
PERHAPS IF WE ARE LUCKY, THE CURRENT WILL TAKE US TOWARD IT!
ALL DAY LONG, BENEATH THAT BURNING SUN, YOU DRIFT...
WHEW! IT... IT IS HOT! I AM SO THIRSTY!
AND WE HAVE NO WATER... NOT A DROP!
...AND THAT NIGHT, YOU SHIVER AS THE WIND SWEEPS ACROSS THE SEA...
WATER... JUST ONE DRINK!
PERHAPS... PERHAPS WE WILL REACH LAND TOMORROW!
BUT THE NEXT DAY IS THE SAME! ADRIFT.. BENEATH THE BLAZING SUN! YOUR LIPS ARE CRACKED AND SWOLLEN! YOU LICK THEM WITH A DRY TONGUE...
IF... IF ONLY... GASP... IT WOULD RAIN!
THERE ISN'T A CLOUD IN THE SKY!
AND THAT NIGHT, HENRI BECOMES DELIRIOUS...
WATER... WATER...
HUSH, HENRI! HUSH!
THE NEXT DAY DAWNS LIKE THE LAST TWO... A CLOUDLESS SKY... A FIERY SUN... AND THE INCESSANT HEAT! HENRI STARES DOWN AT THE WATER LAPPING THE BOAT-SIDES... MUTTERING...
TO DRINK... JUST... ONE DROP... TO WET... SO DRY... TO DRINK... ONE DROP... SO DRY...
WET DRINK
NO... GASP... HENRI! NO! IT IS SEA WATER! IT IS SALTY!
HENRI DOES NOT LISTEN! HE LEANS OVER THE SIDE... SCOOPING UP THE OCEAN WATER AND SPLASHING IT INTO HIS MOUTH...
WATER... CHOKE... COUGH... WATER...
HENRI! STOP IT! IT WILL DRIVE YOU MAD!

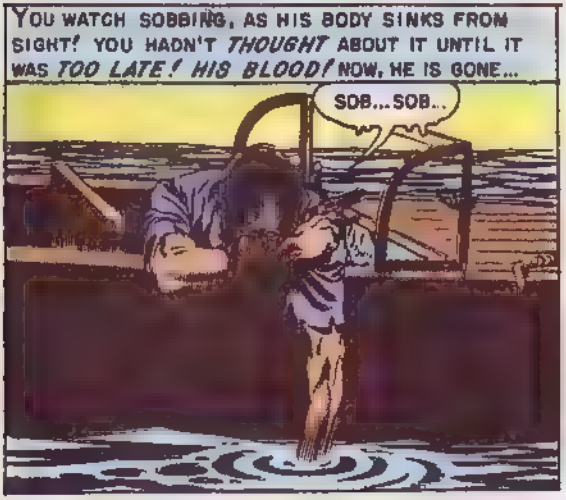
BUT HENRI DOES NOT LISTEN TO YOU! HE KEEPS CUPPING THE OCEAN WATER INTO HIS PARCHED AND BLISTERED MOUTH! AND YOU KNOW WHAT YOU MUST DO...



YOU SQUEEZE THE TRIGGER! THE EXPLOSION ECHOES OUT ACROSS THE WATER AND HENRI PITCHES OVER THE SIDE...



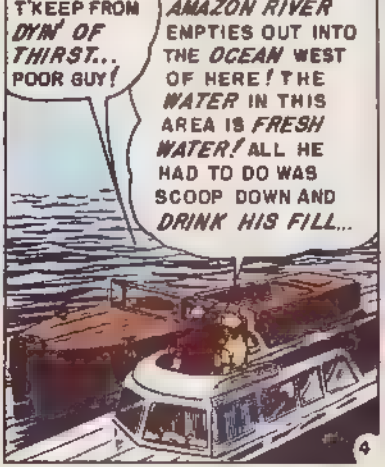
YOU WATCH SOBBING, AS HIS BODY SINKS FROM SIGHT! YOU HADN'T *THOUGHT* ABOUT IT UNTIL IT WAS *TOO LATE! HIS BLOOD!* NOW, HE IS GONE...



THE NEXT DAY YOU CAN HARDLY MOVE! THE BROILING SUN BAKES DOWN UPON YOUR BLISTERED FACE! YOU STARE DOWN AT THE COOL-LOOKING SEA-WATER...

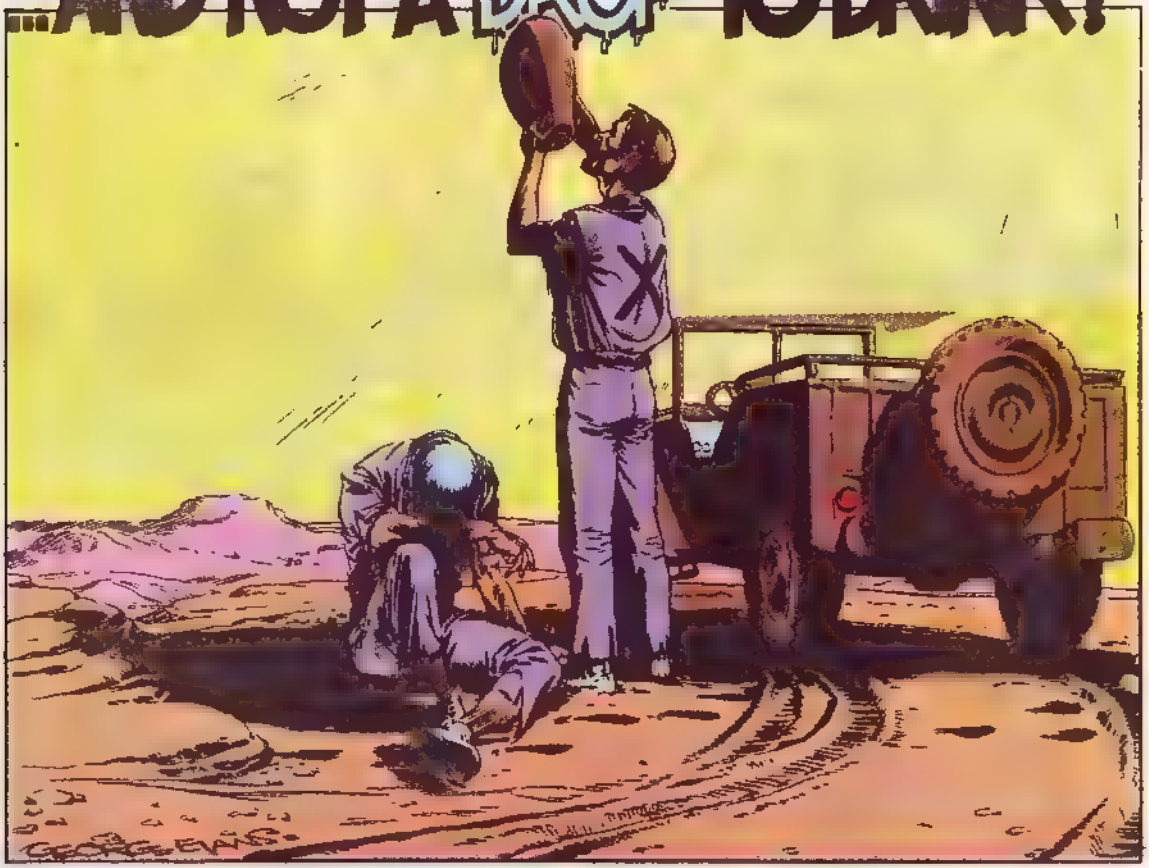
SO YOU RAISE THE GUN TO YOUR TEMPLE AND...

AND YOU NEVER HEAR THE MOTOR LAUNCH DRAW NEAR...

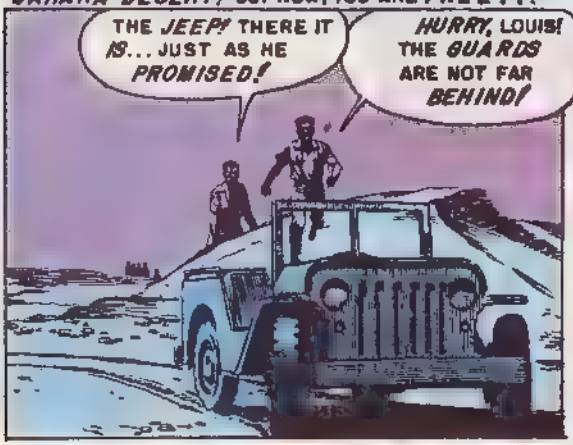

LOOKS LIKE HE *KILLED* HIMSELF T'KEEP FROM *DYIN' OF THIRST*... POOR GUY!
YES! *POOR SOUL!* HE DIDN'T KNOW HIS *LOCATION!* THE *AMAZON RIVER* EMPTIES OUT INTO THE *OCEAN* WEST OF HERE! THE *WATER* IN THIS AREA IS *FRESH WATER!* ALL HE HAD TO DO WAS SCOOP DOWN AND *DRINK HIS FILL*...

IF *THAT* DIDN'T QUENCH YOUR THIRST FOR IRONY, PERHAPS *THIS* WILL! IT'S CALLED:

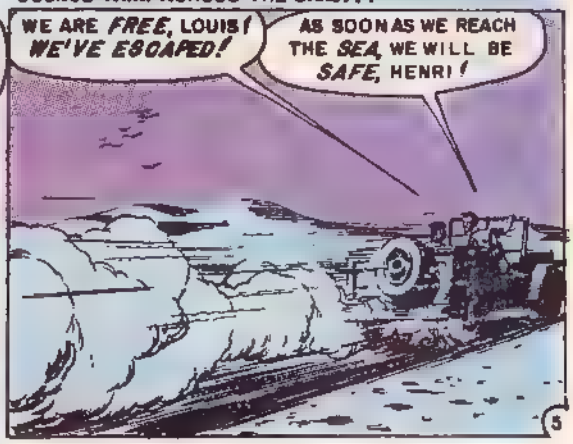
...AND NOT A DROP TO DRINK!



IN THIS SECOND *'E.C. QUICKIE,'* YOU ARE AGAIN *LOUIS DUVAL!* AND YOU ARE AGAIN *FRENCH!* BUT FOR THE *LAST TEN YEARS,* YOU HAVE BEEN AN INMATE OF A *SMALL PRISON* ON THE EDGE OF THE *GREAT SAHARA DESERT!* BUT NOW, YOU ARE *FREE...*



YES, LOUIS! YOU ARE *FREE!* YOU AND YOUR CELL-MATE, HENRI POUSSAN, HAVE JUST MADE A *MAD DASH* INTO THE DESERT NIGHT TO THE JEEP... THE JEEP YOU *BRIBED A GUARD FOR!* AND NOW AS YOU BOUNCE AWAY ACROSS THE SAND...



IT'S ABOUT FIVE HOURS LATER THAT YOU RUN OUT OF GAS...
WHAT DO YOU MEAN, THE GAS CANS ARE EMPTY?
HE LIED, HENRI! HE DOUBLE-CROSSED US! WE WERE SUPPOSED TO GET ENOUGH GAS TO REACH THE SEA...
SOON, THE DAWN BREAKS...AND THE BLAZING DESERT SUN CLIMBS INTO THE SKY...
WE HAVE NO WATER! WE'RE MAROONED HERE...WITHOUT ANY WATER!
WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
I'M GOING TO TRY TO MAKE IT ON FOOT!
DON'T BE A FOOL, HENRI! YOU'LL DIE OF THIRST OUT THERE! STAY HERE...BY THE JEEP! PERHAPS SOMEONE WILL SEE US!
BUT NO ONE COMES! THE SUN BEATS DOWN! YOUR MOUTH DRIES! THE NIGHT FALLS! YOU SHIVER! THE NEXT DAY... SUN AGAIN! FINALLY ON THE THIRD DAY, HENRI RUNS OFF... SCREAMING HYSTERICALLY...
WATER! I SEE IT! LOOK! THE LAKE! THE LAKE!
HENRI! COME BACK!
HE IS GONE. DELIRIOUSLY CHASING A MIRAGE! YOU LICK YOUR CRACKED AND BLISTERED LIPS WITH YOUR DRY TONGUE...
WATER...SOB... WATER...
YOU LAY BACK AGAINST THE JEEP! THE SUN BROILS DOWN...THE SKY BLAZES... THE HEAT...
NO! NO! I WILL NOT DIE OF THIRST LIKE HENRI...OUT THERE!
SO YOU RAISE THE GUN TO YOUR TEMPLE AND...
AS THE LIFE EBBS FROM YOUR BODY, THE WATER SPLASHES AGAINST YOUR LIPS...
...AND YOU DIE WITHOUT KNOWING THAT IT WAS SO CLOSE! THE BULLET SMASHING THROUGH YOUR BRAIN HAS PUNCTURED THE RADIATOR OF THE JEEP...

THE HAUNT OF FEAR

HEE, HEE! YEP, IT'S YOUR *HOSTESS* IN *THE HAUNT OF FEAR, THE OLD WITCH*, ONCE AGAIN *'GUEST-SPOT-TING'* ANOTHER ISSUE OF *CRIME SUSPENSTORIES!* I SEE BY YOUR *DROOLING CHINS* THAT YOU'RE READY FOR ANOTHER *HORROR-HELPING* FROM *MY CAULDRON!* WELL, I'VE RUSTLED UP A *REAL REVOLTING RECIPE* THIS TIME, SO *COME ON IN* AND I'LL SERVE YOU THE *SPINE-TINGLER* I CALL...

HAIL AND HEART-Y!

ANNA SHIVERED AS SHE TRUDGED DOWN THE STREET! THE TREES THAT LINED IT, STRIPPED OF THEIR FLESH-LEAVES, STOOD LIKE SKELETONS, REACHING THEIR BONEY FINGERS TOWARD THE BLEAK NOVEMBER SKY OVERHEAD! THE FRAIL, SAD-FACED WOMAN BUNDLED HER FLIMSY COAT TIGHTER AROUND HER NECK AND HURRIED ON UNTIL SHE CAME TO A PAINT-STARVED CLAPBOARD HOUSE...

OH...DEAR! HE *DIDN'T TAKE THEM DOWN!* THEY'RE *STILL UP!* AND I *ASKED* HIM...I *BEGGED* HIM...

GHASTLY

ANNA STARED UP AT THE BLACK SCREENS STILL HANGING IN THE WINDOWS, VETERANS OF THE PREVIOUS SUMMER'S INSECT WAR! FROM THEM, STREAKS OF RUST, LIKE TEAR-STAINS, RAN DOWN THE STRUCTURE'S PALLID WOODEN FACE...

EVERYTHING! I...I HAVE TO DO *EVERYTHING MYSELF!* HE...HE DOESN'T LIFT A *FINGER!* NOT A *FINGER!*

ANNA MOVED UP THE CRACKED CEMENT WALK TOWARD THE FRONT DOOR! AT HER FEET, A CARNIVAL OF LEAVES DANCED AND SWIRLED, RUSTLING AND SCRATCHING LIKE WALTZERS AT A COSTUME BALL...

THE *LAWN* WILL BE *RUINED* BY SPRING IF THE *LEAVES AREN'T RAKED UP!* THEY'LL *MAT DOWN* AND *KILL THE GRASS!* IT *ISN'T HARD* TO RAKE UP *LEAVES!* HE COULD DO *THAT*...AT *LEAST!*

THE SHIVERING WOMAN FUMBLED FOR HER KEYS AND FINALLY SWUNG THE FRONT DOOR OPEN! IT SQUEAKED SHRILLY, RESENTING THE DISTURBANCE...

I TOLD HIM *LAST WEEK* TO *OIL THE HINGES!* TOO MUCH *WORK* FOR HIM...

ANNA CLOSED THE PROTESTING DOOR BEHIND HER AND SLIPPED OFF HER THREADBARE COAT! A VOICE BOOMED FROM THE LIVING ROOM...

ANNA? THAT *YOU?*

YES, BEN!... IT'S *ME*... SIGH...

THE LIVING ROOM WAS DARK! ANNA REACHED IN AND SNAPPED ON THE LIGHT SWITCH! THE CLICK WAS SHARP AND LOUD! NOTHING HAPPENED...

BEN! YOU *DIDN'T CHANGE THE BULB!* I *ASKED* YOU TO CHANGE THE *BULB!*

HUN? OH! I *FORGOT*, ANNA.

THE WOMAN MOVED ACROSS THE ROOM AND LIT A LAMP! BEN SQUINTED UP AT HER FROM HIS PROSTRATE POSITION ON THE COUCH...

TURN IT *OFF, HUN?* IT *HURTS MY EYES!*

BEEN *SLEEPING* ALL AFTERNOON, I SUPPOSE!

BEN SAT UP, STRETCHED, AND SCRATCHED HIS HEAD... YAWNING...

JUS'...AHHUMMM... *RESTING*, ANNA! YOU *KNOW* I GOT TO TAKE IT EASY! MY *HEART*...

YOUR *HEART!* *YOUR HEART!* THAT'S ALL I *HEAR* IS YOUR *HEART!*

WELL, YOU KNOW I GOT A BAD HEART, ANNA! DOC BREWSTER SAYS I COULD GO... POOF... LIKE THAT... IF I DON'T TAKE IT EASY!
OILING A HINGE WON'T KILL YOU! CHANGING A LIGHT BULB...
DON'T, ANNA! PLEASE DON'T YELL AT ME! IT... IT UPSETS ME... AND I GET A PAIN... HERE.. IN MY CHEST!
I'M. I'M SORRY, BEN!
T'MORROW'S ASH COLLECTION DAY, ANNA! I I WISH I COULD HELP YOU ..
I'LL MANAGE, BEN!
ANNA WENT DOWN INTO THE CELLAR AND PEERED INTO THE FURNACE! THE FIRE HAD BURNED DOWN LOW! SHE OPENED THE COAL-BIN AND CARRIED SHOVELFUL AFTER SHOVELFUL OF THE BLACK FUEL... TOSSING THEM INTO THE GAPING FURNACE MOUTH..
I .GASP I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG I CAN GO ON LIKE THIS... WORKING AT A JOB ALL DAY... TAKING CARE OF THE HOUSE AT NIGHT...
THEN SHE BEGAN CARRYING THE HUGE CANS OF ASHES UP THE BACK CELLAR STEPS..
I'LL HELP YOU, MRS. STORCH!
OH... GASP... THAT'S ALL RIGHT... GASP... MR. DANBURY!
MR. DANBURY WAS ANNA'S NEIGHBOR! HE TOOK HER BY THE ARM GENTLY..
THIS IS A MAN'S WORK, MRS. STORCH! I DON'T MIND... REALLY...
IT'S GOOD OF YOU, MR. DANBURY! I... I APPRECIATE IT!
MR. DANBURY CARRIED THE LOADED ASH-CANS OUT TO THE FRONT CURB! ANNA WATCHED HIM, CATCHING HER BREATH...
...THE LEAST I COULD DO, MRS. STORCH, WITH BEN OUT OF COMMISSION LIKE THAT!
HE, HE COULD DO THE LITTLE THINGS! I DON'T ASK HIM TO CARRY ASHES! BUT THE LITTLE THINGS...
3

MR. DANBURY PLACED THE LAST CAN AT THE CURB-SIDE AND DUSTED HIS HANDS! HE SMILED AT ANNA..
WELL, I'M SURE IT'S HARD ON BEN, TOO, MRS. STORCH! IT'S TOUGH FOR A MAN TO BE ACTIVE ALL HIS LIFE AND THEN HAVE TO STOP...LIKE A RUN-DOWN-CLOCK!
HE DOESN'T HAVE TO STOP! NOT ALTOGETHER! HE COULD MAKE HIMSELF USEFUL!
MR. DANBURY NODDED TOWARD THE SCREENED WINDOWS...
I...I'LL HELP YOU WITH THOSE THIS WEEKEND, MRS. STORCH! THE WEATHER'LL RUIN 'EM IF YOU LEAVE 'EM UP!
THANK YOU, MR. DANBURY! THANK YOU SO MUCH!
BEN STORCH PEERED OUT OF THE WINDOW AT THE ASH-CANS NEATLY LINED AT THE CURB! HE GRINNED! IT WAS A GRIN OF SATISFACTION... A GRIN EXPOSING HIS GOLD TEETH...
BUT THE GRIN WAS GONE WHEN ANNA CAME INTO THE LIVING ROOM WITH THE LIGHT BULB! BEN'S FACE WAS SAD...
CAREFUL, ANNA! DON'T FALL!
YOU'LL HAVE TO RAKE THE LEAVES TOMORROW, BEN! IT'S GOING TO SNOW ANY DAY NOW!
BUT, ANNA...
NO 'BUTS', BEN! IF IT SNOWS, THE LEAVES WILL MAT DOWN AND THE LAWN WILL BE HORRIBLE NEXT SPRING! YOU'VE GOT TO RAKE THEM! IT ISN'T HARD WORK...
I CAN'T, ANNA! I TRIED TODAY, AND I GOT THAT PAIN! I CAN'T RAKE 'EM!
WELL, WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO? STAY HOME FROM WORK?
MAYBE... THIS WEEKEND...?
THIS WEEKEND, MR. DANBURY AND I ARE TAKING DOWN THE SCREENS... FINALLY! CAN'T YOU MAKE YOURSELF USEFUL, BEN? JUST A LITTLE...
4

BUT THE NEXT DAY, WHEN ANNA CAME HOME FROM WORK, THE LEAVES STILL LAY UPON THE FRONT LAWN, A QUILTWORK OF GOLD AND RED...
OH, BEN... SOB... BEN!
AND SO, THAT EVENING, STRAINING HER EYES IN THE FRIGID DARKNESS, ANNA GATHERED THEM UP...
NOT... ONE THING! NOT ONE! HE ISN'T GOOD FOR ANYTHING...
BEN STORCH'S GOLD TEETH FLASHED IN THE WARM LIGHT OF THE LIVING ROOM AS HE GRINNED OUT AT HIS EXHAUSTED WIFE SCRATCHING THE FREEZING GROUND...
AND THAT NIGHT, THE SNOW FELL! THE WHITE FEATHER-LIKE FLAKES FLUTTERED DOWN OUT OF THE BLACKNESS INTO THE LIGHT RAYS CAST THROUGH THE STORCH'S LIVING ROOM WINDOW...
IT'S SNOWIN', ANNA! YOU JUST GOT THOSE LEAVES UP IN TIME!
YES... SIGH... BEN!
I... I HOPE IT AIN'T A HEAVY SNOW, ANNA... FOR YOUR SAKE!
MY SAKE? WHY?
BEN TURNED AWAY FROM THE WINDOW, AND HIS FACE WAS SAD...
SHOVELIN' SNOW'S HARD WORK, ANNA!
SHOVELING... OH... NO!
BEN LAY DOWN ON THE COUCH AND STARED UP AT THE CEILING...
I... I WISH I COULD HELP YOU, ANNA... BUT MY HEART...
I KNOW, BEN! I KNOW!
5

IT WAS STILL DARK THE NEXT MORNING WHEN ANNA CAME OUT OF THE HOUSE! BEN, TANGLED IN HIS WARM BED, SLEPT SOUNDLY UPSTAIRS! IT HAD STOPPED SNOWING, AND A BLANKET OF WHITE SHROUDED EVERYTHING! ANNA STARTED SHOVELING...

GASP...GASP...

THE SCRAPING OF THE METAL SHOVEL ON THE CEMENT SIDEWALK AWAKENED BEN AND HE CLIMBED FROM HIS ROOST! HE SLID TO THE WINDOW AND SMILED DOWN AT THE NEAT PATH HIS WIFE HAD CUT THROUGH THE WHITE...

WHEN ANNA HAD CLEARED THE SNOW FROM THE SIDEWALK IN FRONT OF HER HOUSE, SHE PUT THE SHOVEL ON THE PORCH AND TRUDGED OFF DOWN THE STREET TO WORK...

PUFF...PUFF...

FOR TWO LONG BLOCKS SHE PLODDED THROUGH THE DEEP WHITE SNOW! SUDDENLY...

OOOOOHH! MY *CHEST!* I...I..., IT *HURTS!*

DOCTOR BREWSTER OPENED THE DOOR IN ANSWER TO THE FRANTIC RINGING OF THE BELL...

WELL! *MRS. STORCH...*

I...GASP... I GOT A...GASP... SUDDEN *PAIN*, DOCTOR! HERE! I... GASP...

IT WAS AN HOUR LATER...AFTER CONDUCTING A THOROUGH EXAMINATION...THAT DOCTOR BREWSTER SHOOK HIS FINGER AT ANNA...

YOU'VE GOT TO START TAKING IT *EASY*, MRS. STORCH! YOU'RE NOT GETTING ANY *YOUNGER*, YOU KNOW! IT'S YOUR *HEART*...

SO NOW IT'S THE *TWO* OF US WITH BAD HEARTS, EH, DOCTOR? FIRST *BEN*...AND NOW *ME!*

BEN? BAD HEART? WHY I *EXAMINED* BEN LAST *SUMMER, DIDN'T* I? HE CAME TO ME BECAUSE OF A *PAIN* IN HIS *CHEST!* THAT'S *RIGHT!* HEH, HEH! *OVER-EATING*, I TOLD HIM! *SIMPLE INDIGESTION!* BEN'S HEART? WHY *HIS HEART'S AS STRONG AS A MAN'S HALF HIS AGE...*

IT HAD STARTED TO HAIL WHEN ANNA CAME DOWN THE STREET! HER NEATLY CLEANED SIDEWALK WAS COVERED WITH A LAYER OF SLICK ICE! SHE ALMOST SLIPPED GOING UP THE WALK...

SHE SLAMMED INTO THE HOUSE! BEN, SPRAWLED ON THE COUCH, OPENED HIS EYES...

HUH? WHO'S THAT? OH... IT'S YOU, ANNA! SAY... WHAT TIME *IS IT?*

ANNA HURRIED PAST THE LIVING ROOM AND DOWN INTO THE CELLAR! BEN SAT UP SCRATCHING HIS HEAD...

HEY! IT'S *EARLY*, ANNA! HOW COME YOU'RE *HOME SO EARLY?*

WILL YOU COME *DOWN* HERE FOR A MINUTE, BEN?

BEN WENT DOWN, COMPLAINING! ANNA STOOD THERE... HER HAIR MUSSED... HER EYES WILD! SHE HELD THE HATCHET TIGHTLY IN HER HAND! BEN BACKED AWAY HORRIFIED...

GOOD-FOR-NOTHING! USELESS, LAZY, GOOD-FOR-NOTHING LIAR! BAD HEART, IS IT? CAN'T DO *ANYTHING*... NOT GOOD FOR *ANYTHING*...

ANNA! NO...

WHEN MR. DANBURY CAME HOME FROM WORK LATER THAT DAY, HE FOUND ANNA STORCH LIGHTLY SKIPPING ALONG THE SIDEWALK IN FRONT OF HER HOUSE... A BUCKET SWINGING IN HER HAND...

SCATTERING *ASHES*, MRS. STORCH? CAN I *HELP* YOU?

OH, *NO*, MR. STORCH! THAT'S *ALL RIGHT!* *BEN'S* BEING *USEFUL*... *THIS TIME*...

...AND SHE WENT ON, GAYLY TOSSING THE BLACK ASHES TO THE ICY SIDEWALK! MR. DANBURY WATCHED ANNA FOR A WHILE... THEN STOOPED AND PICKED SOMETHING UP...

BEN'S BEING USEFUL... BEN'S BEING USEFUL...

A... CHOKE... A GOLD TOOTH! GOOD LORD!

HEE, HEE! YEP, KIDDIES! THAT'S MY *STORY!* BEN MADE HIMSELF *USEFUL* ALL RIGHT... THE *SILLY ASH!* ONLY TROUBLE WAS, HIS *TALENTS* WERE SPREAD A LITTLE *THIN!* BUT AT LEAST THERE WEREN'T ANY *SLIP-UPS* THAT NIGHT!

AS FAR AS *ANNA* IS CONCERNED, SHE COPPED AN *INSANITY PLEA* AND IS NOW SHOVELING *IMAGINARY BODIES* INTO AN *IMAGINARY FURNACE* IN A *VERY REAL PADDED CELL!*

WELL, I'LL SEE YOU *AGAIN* IN THE *NEXT* ISSUE OF *CRIME SUSPENSTORIES!* TILL THEN, *BYE*... *E.C.*, THAT IS!

-THE END-

The Old Witch